

SOME
Considerations
CONCERNING
The Present State
OF
RELIGION;
WITH
Some ESSAYS towards our
LOVE and UNION.

Micah 3. 11. *The Heads thereof judge for
Reward, and the Priests thereof teach
for Hire, and the Prophets divine for
Money: yet will they lean upon the Lord,
and say, The Lord is among us.*

*By a sincere Lover of Truth and Union.
i.e. John Mortimer Esqr.*

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THE Consideration of the present Condition that Religion is in, occasioned my applying my self to consider its Primative Institution, and to compare it with the Present Practice: In which finding so great a Difference as there is, made me resolve to inquire into the Occasion of its Defects; and likewise to endeavour to propose a Remedy to prevent the increase of those Evils, that seem to threaten the Ruine of it, and all true Piety. In the doing of which, I shall first begin with a brief Account of the Foundation of Religion, and a Description of the purer part of it: And secondly, tell you what Steps have been taken, and who 'tis that hath undermined its Purity and Simplicity; and that 'tis by those that make a Profession of it, and are chiefly bound to

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promote it, did not Interest and Ambition, make them, instead of being promoters, ruiners of its Cause and Interest.

The Christian Religion is the most pure and most holy of all Religions. The Purity of it declares to the World its Author, the Simplicity of it its Innocency, and the Love of its Members one towards another, and to a'l Mankind, the infinite Love and Mercy that 'tis grounded upon.

The Design of Religion was, 1. To restore to God the Honour, Duty and Obedience of Man. 2. To enable Man to attain to Eternal Happiness. 3. To regulate Mens Lives, so as it may be consistent with their own Good, and the Good of Humane Society : All which Things are plainly revealed in Scripture, and needs neither Equivocation, nor evasive Exposition of Text to manifest ; and is sum'd up by Christ himself in one Word, *viz.* The Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour : Which that we may not make a Mistake about the degree of, is as plainly set forth, in that we are commanded to *love God above all things, and our Neighbour as our self* ; than which no plainer Rule could be given : For there is nothing that we can more easily understand, or regulate our Lives by than Love ; and therefore Christ fixes the sum of all Religion in it, as the most plain and easiest Thing that we are capable of understanding. Besides which, we have the Assistance of God's Grace, which he freely gives to all those that sincerely endeavour, and desire, to please him : For whatsoever in Religion is necessary to be known, is plain and easie to all, because God desires all should be saved ; and therefore a Desire of knowing and practicing, grounded upon the sincere Love of it, is the chief Thing to be aimed at, and desired. But if we con-

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consider the Religion practiced in the World, we shall find it quite a different thing, though veiled under the name of Christianity ; and greater stress laid upon those Things that serve Mens Turns, than upon the Substantials of Religion.

As first, the School-men have turned this plain Doctrine into nothing but Niceties, Cavils and Speculations, above the reach of Humane Understanding ; whereas the Arguments and Disputes about Religion ought only to be such as may inforce the practice of it, and not to puzzle the Understanding. These Things rather fill Mens Heads than their Hearts, which is the seat of Love and Affection.

A second sort of Men have made all Practical Religion void, and useless, and to serve their Lust and Interest made any thing lawful ; making Religion, that is a thing of the greatest Sincerity and most Purity, only a piece of Deceit and Cunning, and a Shroud for Wickedness and Villany, and that with that Cunning as to make these additional Pretences more necessary, and of more value, than the substantial Parts of Religion ; so as that he that questions them, or not observes them, is in more danger than he that disowns the Christian Religion it self.

A third sort of People place it in this or that particular Form of Church Government ; which is not the Essence, or Substantial Part of Religion, though most place the chief of Religion in it. The *Romanist* in the Infallibility of their Church ; the *Church of England* in their Episcopal Government, and Ceremonies ; the *Presbyterians* in their Form of Government, and in their Communion ; the *Independents* the same in theirs ; so that 'tis hard to find which are most formal and stiff in their particular Way, (the *Papist* only excepted) and have the most

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Hatred one against another, though professing that Religion that is made up of Love and Forbearance ; and that though there is no Distinction made either by Christ, or his Apostles, except only of Men that serve God, and that serve the Devil. A Distinction that is on the other hand too little heeded by the *Church of England*, though Men are never so Debauch'd ; and by the *Dissenters*, where Men are Covetous, and want Charity ; provided they are but zealous for a Party (though it be to the destruction of Humane Society, the letting in of Popery, the ruine of the Nation, and of Religion it self,) yet these Men shall be valued by the Clergy ; especially if they are for Persecution, and for the Destruction of their Brethren : For most Men do as *Jehu* did with *Joiram's* Messengers, when they came to ask if it were Peace, *2 Kings* 9. 17. he commanded them to turn behind him, and follow him. And so most are desirous to get Followers rather than to treat of Peace.

What part of Religion 'tis that these Men ground these Principles upon, I cannot find. I am certain that a revengeful persecuting Spirit is the most contrary to the design and intent of the Gospel of any thing whatever, and is not to be excused upon the pretence of Zeal for God, for Religion, or for a Party : For,

1. 'Tis contrary to Christ's Command ; to love one another, and to love all Men, even our Enemies. We ought to be so far from persecuting those that hate us, that we ought not to hate those that persecute us. We ought to follow Peace with all Men ; to which nothing can be more opposite than Cruelties, Persecutions, Conspiracies, Massacres, Inquisitions, and designs to persecute and destroy all that differ from us.

2. 'Tis

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2. 'Tis contrary to Christ's Practice. He could by a divine miraculous Power have destroyed his Enemies, which might have been of force to convince, as well as to destroy ; but he only uses the bands of Love, and a peaceable Method, without the Example of a Furious Zeal or Religious Rage : As *Tertullian* well observes, 'Tis not Religion to force Religion, but that it ought to be willingly, and not forceably receiv'd. Religion was proposed for Mens Advantage ; if they refuse it, 'tis at their own peril.

3. A persecuting Spirit can upon no account be so likely to be justified, upon any pretence whatsoever, as that of Zeal for God and Religion ; and yet though those whom the Apostles would have called for Fire from Heaven upon were *Samaritans*, Hereticks and Schismatics, that had affronted Christ himself, the Honour of God and Religion, yet in this Case Christ tells them, *They knew not what manner of Spirits they were of ; and that he was not come to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them : And if Christ came to save Mens Lives, certainly he never design'd his Followers should destroy them, and act so contrary to his Principles.*

We ought (as one says) to set Bounds to our Zeal by Discretion, to Errour by Truth, to Passion by Reason, and Divisions by Charity ; for 'tis a false Zeal that acts for any other end than the Destruction of Sin, the Advancement of God's Glory, and the Peace and Good of Mankind in general.

And therefore I would fain find these Men that are so Zealous for the Church, and Persecution, Zealous for a Reformation, for Holiness, and for the promotion of true Piety ; which as it doth not consist in a persecuting Spirit, so is it opposite to all private or particular Interest or Designs, either of

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particular Men or Parties : For I cannot but think that particular Parties, as well as particular Men, do very ill in using politick Designs one against another. The Gospel in the Primative Times was only promoted by Simplicity, Purity and good Example ; and if no other way were used now, I am satisfied it would be more effectual than all the Devices of Men. The Truth will vindicate its self, and needs no support any other way than by Mens Actions, to declare their Belief of it. For Force can only make Hypocrites, Example and Reason must overcome the Mind ; else Christ had never suffered so much for Example sake. He could have done more than all the World besides, both by Preaching, Perswasions and Miracles, yet he prefers Example. Let Men receive the Truth in the Love of it, and with pure Designs and Ends, and I am perswaded it will regulate Religion more than all the Devices, Designs, and particular Opinions of particular Men and Parties. Let Politicks be used only against the common Enemies of Mankind, where neither Truth, Goodness nor Honesty is to be found ; but among Religious Men, the only Contest should be, who should outdo each other in Love, Charity, Forbearance and Kindness, rather than in Designs, Devices and Deceits : For Religion is of another make, its Ends and Designs is not to provoke Men to Hatred one of another, but to the greatest Love ; to ennoble the Mind, and beget a holy Desire in it after a conformity to God, and the injoyment of him ; to regulate all our Actions and Thoughts, so as to be able to give up our Accounts with Joy. These are the great Points of Religion, and what most will pretend to own, though few are willing to practice.

But,

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But, as Bishop Tillotson says, ought not the great Matters wherein we are agreed, our Union in the Doctrine of the Christian Religion, and in all the necessary Articles of that Faith that was once delivered to the Saints, and in all substantial parts of Religion and of God's Worship, and in the great Duties of Christian Life, to be of greater force to unite us, than Differences in doubtful Opinions, and in little Rites and Circumstances of Worship, to divide and break us?

Are not the Things about which we differ, in their nature indifferent? That is, Things about which there ought to be no difference amongst wise Men. Are they not at a great distance from the Life and Essence of Religion, and rather good or bad, as they tend to the Peace and Unity of the Church, or are made use of to Schism or Faction, than either necessary or evil in themselves?

For the Differences in Religion and Protestants, chiefly consist in those Things that do not at all, or very little, concern the Fundamentals of Religion, and is always contrary to the chiefest parts of it, such as Humility, Peace, Love, Meekness and Forbearance.

Now in Differences there commonly is two Mischiefs that attend them. 1. They are apt to take Men off from minding the principal necessary parts of Religion. Men are naturally more apt to be pleased with the less necessary parts of Religion, than the substantial parts of it; and with the *Pharisees* to rithe Mint, Annise and Cummin, while they neglect the weightier part of the Law, such as Faith, Mercy, Judgment, Love to God, to our Neighbour, the mortifying our Love to the Things of the World, our Pleasures, Lust, &c. Few consider that God will sooner pardon ten Sins of Ignorance,

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rance, than one wilful neglect of a known Duty, such as Love, Mercy, Holiness, &c. must be.

2. Differences are very dangerous, in that they make Men have false Hopes, and place their Religion and Zeal in Things not necessary to Salvation; it makes them formal in placing their Salvation in being of a Church or Party, and in hating and uncharitably censuring one another, when both Religion and Salvation consists in being of a different temper, and contrary practice. 'Tis not a Name will admit us to Heaven; nor do I believe any Church or Party to have the priviledge of saving a wicked Man.

Now as I have shewn you what Religion was in its Primative Institution, and what it ought to be now, I shall proceed to the Second Thing proposed, which was to shew wherein the Present Practice of Religion and that in the Primative Times differ.

1. In the Primative Times there was no distinction of Parties, those were called Disciples, Christians, Believers, &c. that made Profession of Christianity, and whose Life and Conversation did not contradict their Profession, and were charitably judged to be such: They had not amongst them those names now used to distinguish Party from Party, they only then looked at Christian Profession and Christian Practice. Indeed real Christianity is what ought to be prized; but now any Thing passes for a Christian that is of a Party, let his Conversation be what it will, and his Principles the most contrary to that Divine Love and Mercy that hath constituted the Christian Religion.

2. In the Primative Times the Love of the Brethren was the admiration of the Heathens, as *Tertullian* tells us: But now what shall we find in Religion but Contention, Strife, Envy, Malice; and that

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that Religion that was then the band of Love and Peace, is now made the occasion of Bloodshed, Massacres, the Ruine of Kingdoms and the Subversion of Governments ; whereas in the Primative Times, the Thing that made Christianity find an easie admittance into particular States was because it did not usurp upon the Civil Power, but tended to its Peace and Happiness : For none hardly ever charged the Christian Religion with being a Rebelious Seditious Thing, or made it so, but the Roman Catholicks, and a particular sort of Men among us much of the same Principles.

Now the occasion of all the Mischiefs and Divisions that attend Religion amongst Protestants are superficial additions to it; no way belonging either to the Fundamentals, or the purity or useful part of it : Those additions have always been increasing under one pretence or another, Interest or Debauchery have commonly been the founders of them, and hath been the cause of their undermining the substantial parts of Religion ; and therefore 'tis good to be careful, and not to be beguiled by the Subtilties of Men, who are swayed more by their Corruptions than the true Interest of Religion : The Reason of which is because,

1. Men are more fond of their own Opinions than of Religion ; the one is natural, the other contradictory to Nature. Men are always most zealous for their own ways, especially when gilded over with a pretence of Religion.

2. Pride, Credit and Interest, are commonly at the bottom of all Contentions, and make Men eager and violent.

3. The purest and powerful part of Religion is what Man is most averse too : The Devil knows that in that lies the strength of Religion, and therefore

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fore he doth what he can to keep Men from it. He will let them please themselves as much as they will about the superficial parts of Religion, especially about Contelt, because they make moſt for his Intereſt.

4. In Religion it often happens that there are two contending Parties, whom the increaſe of their Followers, and Power of the one Party begets a Jealouſie in the other. This begets Contentions, makes Oppoſitions, and commonly begets Reflections, while Men do not conſider that what they caſt upon each Party doth not reſt there, but upon Religion it ſelf.

This is what makes Religion ſo deſpiſed, and that makes Men believe it only to be a Trick, when they find the Profeſſors of it neglecters of the beſt and moſt ſubſtantial parts of it, and managers of it for their Intereſt and Deſign.

Now there is nothing Men, and even Religion it ſelf, hath been more abuſed in than in the ſeveral pretences about Church Government. 'Tis a Thing ſuits political Deſigns, and all Men are naturally deſirous of Power. This hath occaſioned the ſtiff Conteſt between the Clergy of all Parties, and is, as I may ſay, the ſpring of all other Controverſies; and therefore 'tis convenient to do what the Apoſtle adviſes, *Rom. 16. 17. To mark them which cauſe Diviſions and Offences among us*: For the doing of which,

I muſt ſay that, I think, according to the moſt impartial Judgment I can make (for my Deſign is not to make Reflections, except upon thoſe Men that make Religion nothing but a Trick, but to inquire into Truth) that a great number of the Miniſters of each Party are the chief Occaſion of all our Diviſions, Uncharitableneſs and Confuſions, about Religion: For,

1. They

1. They have such an influence upon their particular Parties, that I am satisfied they might easily reconcile them, if they were not desirous of keeping up the Breaches. I have often observed in several places of *England*, that where the Ministers are moderate, and Men that only mind the substantial parts of Religion, and were of a Charitable Temper, the People were so too, and were easily reconciled to other Parties. Among the *Church of England*, I have met with some whole Parishes, very few excepted in them, (especially after the Popish Plot and the last Revolution) but what have been moderate, and lovers of the Dissenting Party, and of good Men; though some of them have not practised much Goodness themselves: For Religion ought to be, and will be a reconciling Thing, where Interest doth not over-sway it; and where the Ministers have been of a contrary Spirit, I have almost always found a differing Temper in the People too of all Parties.

2. I have observ'd the Clergy of the *Church of England* to have such an Influence upon the Gentlemen in the Countries, and elsewhere, that even in Civil Things they influence them as they will; as about Elections, and other State Affairs. A plain Instance of which was manifest to the World in their bringing over King *William*: What a Turn did they make in all sorts of people in an instant, when their own Interest was concerned, even to the Contradiction of Passive Obedience, and all the Loyal Doctrines they had been instilling into the people for above thirty Years together, and that even upon Men that seem by their practices to have nothing of Religion in them!

3. I must say that I cannot find the *Dissenters* much less influenced by their Ministers than the
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Church of England is. One pretty remarkable Instance we had of it about the Year 1692, when the Union between the *Presbyterians* and *Independents* was made ; for I found in the City of *London*, while the Union lasted, that the people were moderate and loving one towards another ; but the Ministers had not broke the Union above one Week, before it had such an Influence upon the people, that each Party was grown to such an Inveteracy one against another, that had not the Laws restrained them, I know not to what height of Envy and Malice Things might have been exasperated to.

4. They have made all the Treats for Concord that were managed in *Germany*, and other places, between the *Lutherans* and *Calvinists*, and others, serve only to increase the bleeding Wounds of the Church, by turning all designs of Love into contrivances to out-wit and over reach one another, and to usurp the Power not only of their own Party, but of the other Parties too, into their own hands. This was one of the first Things the *Presbyterian* Clergy attempted upon the *Congregational* Party, as soon as ever the Union was agreed on, and the first Occasion of the Breach of it. See *Hist. of Union*, p. 7. Nay, there was no Breach of Union known in the Church, even in the first Ages of it, about Non-essentials in Religion, till the Clergy attained to a Hierarchy ; as may be seen in *Euseb. Firmilianus*, and others.

5. They have been not only the occasion of the greatest part of the Uncharitableness that is among Parties, but of the greatest Persecutions : For they have under all Governments that have favoured them, usurped a greater Tyranny than the most Tyrannical Government in any place have usurp'd ; witness the Inquisition amongst the *Papists*, the late High

High Commission'd Courts that the Clergy had in *England*: In both which they proceeded without any Legal Process, and in the latter executed more Protestants than suffered in *Queen Mary's* days. Nor were the *Presbyterians* in *Scotland* less Illegal or Cruel, where they not only executed several, but got the power of Excommunication to be at the arbitrary Will of the Clergy, without any Legal Process or Consent of the People, or Witnesses to prove any ill Thing upon the Party; and by such Excommunication all the Parties personal Estate was forfeited.

6. If we consider from what a small Structure such a Pile of Pontifical Greatness is raised, how many Volumes have been writ by the Clergy about it, how much innocent Blood spilt, how many Kingdoms and States ruined, we may easily see who are the disturbers of our Peace, and the occasions of our Confusions; and all this grounded upon a pretended Usurpation founded upon Pride, Ambition, Interest and Malice: For all the Power that is to be found in the Church, and is so contended for, let it be in the People or in the Ministers, consists only in the receiving in and casting out of Members, and in Admonitions and Exhortations, as I shall prove hereafter.

From whence we may easily see what small Things they build that Power upon that at this day is the greatest bone of Contention in the World, and that I will say is the chief cause of all our Mischiefs and Divisions.

Though some Things in Scripture are less plain than others, yet I am satisfied they were left so not with a Design to occasion our hating of one another, but to give us an Opportunity of exercising our Love and Forbearance to one another; and so you'll find

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find the practice of the first Ages of the Church to be, if you consult *Cyprian*, *Firmilian*, and others.

Now as these Things are contrary to Religion it self, so I think it the Duty of all contending Parties to declare to the World, that 'tis not Religion but Vain glory, Pride, &c. that is the Root of their Contention ; and not to make Religion to bear the blame.

But I suppose many will say, that the Clergy do often preach up Love, Union, Forbearance, &c.

I grant that many of them do : But have any of them in their Convocations publickly declared against persecuting the Dissenters ? And do they particularly apply Love and Charity as our Saviour did, when he was asked by the *Jews* who was their Neighbour that they ought to love ? He tells them *Luke* 10. 30. of a Man that fell into the hands of Thieves, &c. and that this Man was a *Samaritan*. And why doth he instance in a *Samaritan* ; but because the *Jews* had the greatest Hatred against the *Samaritans* of any People. Now doth the Church take the same course ? Do they particularly tell the people that the *Presbyterians* are Protestants as well as they, of the same Fundamentals in Religion, and persons that they ought to love as well as them that are of the Church ? Or do they tell them that they are Common-wealths Men against Monarchy, Schismatics ? Nay, do not many of them say they are worse than the *Papists* that would cut the Throats of the *Protestants* ? And if it were true that it were so, the *Samaritans* were worse ; for they revolted wholly from the Jewish Religion and Government too ? And it may be the Presbyterian Loyalty now to a Protestant Prince is as bad an eye-sore to many Men as their Common-wealth Principles were before. Nay, 'tis to be questioned if the Presbyterian
Loyalty

Loyalty is not the occasion of making many so out of love with the present Government as they are? Though a Government of the Churches setting up, for my part I must say, that I do not doubt but that they would dislike even the Church it self, should the *Presbyterians* come into it.

But if all Parties cannot agree in all points, I would fain propose one Thing for each Party to try their Tempers and Spirits by, which I think will be much for the Interest of Religion were it observed; and that is this: Suppose a Man a Hearer at the *Church of England*, and this Man to be a very Debauch'd, Irreligious Man; and that this Man should go from the *Church* to the *Dissenters*, and there be converted, and become a very Sober, Religious, Just Man, will the Ministers and Members of the *Church of England* rejoice at the Conversion of this Man, and be glad that a Soul is converted, though not in their Church; and that there is one Man more to glorifie and praise God? And so, if the same should happen to a *Dissenting Meeting*, would they rejoice at such a change? If not, I think 'tis a plain case that they value their Churches Party before the Honour of God, the Salvation of Souls and Interest of Religion; and if they will not rejoice at it, the Angels will.

I am afraid that under this Head a great many of the *Church of England* will be found promoters rather of their own Interest, than the Interest of Religion and the Salvation of Souls, in the great pains they take to keep up the Sacramental Test; which was a Thing designed for a good End, and would be so now were a right use made of it; which would be to suffer none to receive the Sacrament, but those that are fit to receive it, according to the Institution of the *Scripture*, the *Church of*

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England,

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England, and the Homilies. This would bring only Sober, Religious Men into Office, which would be a very great Advantage both to Church and State. But instead of that, 'tis kept up by the Clergy only to serve their own Designs to keep out the Dissenters, (for 'tis plain the other Test would as well keep out the Papist as the Sacramental) and rather than let them in, they will hazard the Damnation of thousands of Souls, contrary to the express words of the Apostles and their own Institutions. If this be to act according to the Rules of Christianity, which orders to do to all Men as we would be done to, I must declare my Ignorance of Religion, and of every Thing that is Just and Sacred.

Much of the same piece is that Heat and Zeal that was in the Clergy in persecuting the Dissenters; and yet what Charity must they shew in making Collections, &c. for the *French Protestants*; (which was a very good Act in its self,) but it looks, if we rightly consider Things, as if an *English Calvinist* were an Enemy to the Protestant Religion, and a *French Calvinist* a Friend to it; or rather, that the one is an Infidel and the other a Christian.

And what is yet to me more strange is, that in a Christian Church that professes the most pure Religion, and after the purest way of any Church in the World; that there should be in the State as good Laws as can be made against Debauchery and Wick- edness, and neither the Clergy nor any else should put those Laws in execution: Nay, I can by many Examples prove, were it convenient to name particular Names, that many of the Clergy are the zealous Men to get them into places that may be farthest from promoting any thing of a Reformation. Now what a Reformation from the *Church of Rome* signifies, without a Reformation of Manners, I cannot

not tell; nor yet can I understand the Decency and Order of the Church, that consists only in compelling of Men to be of the Church, and not in reforming either its Members or its Ministers: It being plain that the Church, in a few Years time, hath sent out more lewd debauch'd Ministers than all the Ecclesiastical Histories extant can inform us of in all the Reform'd Churches in the World, since the Apostles times.

The Reason of which is not because our Clergy are without Zeal: For no Men were or can be more diligent than they have been, to turn the Laws made against our common Enemies against the most zealous Party in the Nation for a Reformation, and for the opposing of Popery; I mean the Dissenting Party: Which I think they have plainly made appear by their former opposition to Popish Princes, and their Zeal at present for a Protestant one, to the plain Confutation of the Reproaches cast upon them of being of Rebellious Faction Principles.

But though 'tis in vain to propose the purity of Religion, or to declare the Ends and Designs of it to most, so long as Pride, Covetousness and worldly Interest lye in the way, yet as some are desirous of knowing the Truth, so I shall inquire into the several pretences that the several Parties ground their Hierarchy upon, and from whence 'tis that they pretend such a Power derived to the Clergy as each Party contend for, which I reason the source of all our Uncharitableness and Mischiefs. Of which I shall only give brief Hints, lest I run into an endless Controversie.

1. Some pretend their Power from an uninterrupted Succession from the Apostles, and some claim it by a Divine Right derived to them from Christ: But I wish they could make it appear that there is

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an uninterrupted Succession, or prove an unalterable Law about it. If they undertake it they must make out two Things. 1. That it hath always been so: And 2. That it ought to have been so. That it hath not been so, is plain to any one that consults History; and even among the Popes themselves, many of them have made void and nulled the Acts of the former Popes and Bishops, and several of them instead of being, as they pretend, Successors of the Apostles, were Infamous, and rather Followers of the Devil than Successors of Christ or his Apostles: Which must break the Succession, or their Followers must derive their Power from such Men. How the Primative Ordination was, is not known: (See *Chillingworth* on this Subject.) But if it be a Succession, it must be from Popery. If so, why are the Roman Catholicks reckoned Idolaters, if they are able to found the Pillars of our Church? For how can a State be Antichristian and Christian too? But *Hosea* 4. 6. 'tis said, that *they shall not be God's Priest that forget the Law of God*; much less those that wilfully and deceivingly break it, and that occasion the greatest Mischiefs that can befall Religion. So *Isa.* 44. 12. God tells them, *that because they had minister'd before Idols, they should not come near him to do the Priests Office*. And therefore how Protestants can pretend to such a piece of Folly, is nothing but what Design and Interest could form Pretences about. But if our Clergy are the Successors of the Apostles, let them prove it, by doing the Works they did: If not their Miraculous Works, yet their Works of Charity, Love, despising the World, and promoting and practicing of Holiness: Or else we have a sure Word to judge by, that they are none of Christ's; and if they are not his Followers, I will not believe them to be his Successors.

2. Another

2. Another place they pretend mighty Things from for support of their Hierarchy, is in *Rev. 2.* where mention is made of the Angel of the Church of *Ephesus*, and other places. From this they would derive a mighty Title, and a Power of ordering the Church. But suppose that by the Angel is meant the Minister, (which I see no Reason to believe) 'tis hard to determine whether he were a Bishop, Presbiter, or Ruling Elder; and it must be supposed that in them Churches there was more Ministers than one; for every one then spake as they were inspir'd by the Holy Ghost: They had not particular Ministers to take Care of particular Churches, as 'tis now. And we find in *Acts 14. 23.* that where *Paul* and *Barnabas* appointed Elders in the Church, 'tis not said an Elder, but Elders. *Titus* did the same, *Titus 1. 5.* *James 5. 14.* Every where is mention of appointing of several, not of one; and if so, the word Angel must refer not to one Man, but to all the Officers in the Church, or rather the whole Church: For the seven Messages could never be sent to seven particular Men, as is plain from the 5. ver. at the 2. Chap. where Christ having mentioned the particular Sins of the Church, says, *that he will remove her Candlestick out of her place*: Which by the foregoing Chapter at the last verse, plainly signifies the whole Body of the Church; and the Punishments threatened are such as must fall upon the whole Body of the Church.

A third Argument that they bring for their Usurpation is from *Matth. 28. 20.* where Christ tells them, *he will be with the Disciples to the end of the World.* Now there is an impossibility that Christ could be with the Apostles in this World, because they lived here but a short time after him; and therefore it must refer to the 19. ver. where he orders

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orders them to preach the Gospel ; his Word being what he would be with, by his Spirit, in all Ages. For had it refer'd to the Ministers, he must have mentioned the Apostles and their Successors, which he doth not do : So vain are Men in their caviling where Interest leads them. And though at the 18. ver. he says, *that all Power is given to him* ; yet he doth not say, that he gives it to them, or any part of it. He mentions this Power only to let them know, he had Authority from God the Father to send them to preach in his Name.

4. Another great Point that they lay the Foundation of their Hierarchy upon is *Matth. 16. 19.* concerning the Power of the Keys. Now all Protestants agree, that what is said at the 18. ver. relates to the Doctrine of the Church ; and understand by the Rock to be meant Faith, which the Gates of Hell should not prevail against. And why must the 19. ver. in which is mention of the Keys, be understood concerning the Ministerial Power ? May not that as well be taken in a Spiritual Sense, and refer to what it more plainly signifies, which is the Word and the Sacraments ; which was to be accompanied with such a Power of the Spirit, as should unlock Heaven to those that believe it, and exclude those that reject it ? But suppose the Ministers have the Power of Excommunication, (which I shall prove hereafter that they have not) what doth it signifie to that Power that they have and would usurp, and to the Establishment of that Hierarchy that they rend and tear the universal Church of Christ with ? Are not many Souls converted, and become Members of the Church of Christ, without being under their Power and Government ? If so, what can the end and pretence of this Power be, but Design ?

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Besides, if Christ did give the Keys to Peter, it was in his Life-time, when there was no Magistrate, nor Elder, nor Church, (except he alone made a Church, or represented one) to give it to; and therefore Christ's giving of the Keys then, was no Reason that they should be continued to him, since there is no mention made of its being continued to Peter's Successors, or to any other but Peter: And as Peter was the first that made a publick Declaration of the Faith, so what was said to Peter was upon the account of the profession of the Faith he made, and so must refer to that Faith that the Church was grounded and established upon; and so it might be said to him as the only visible Member of the Church, or publick professour of the Faith, and not as a Ruler or Governour, but as a Member of the Church.

5. *Matth.* 18. 17. is brought in as the chief place that they ground their Church Discipline upon, and mighty Things are raised upon them words, *Tell it the Church.* Now suppose Christ had said, Tell it your Neighbour, as he orders them to acquaint two or three of them with it first, we should have thought it a very harsh Interpretation, that if one or two of them were Ministers, it should therefore have been concluded that one or both of these must be our Ruler and Governour, and that the directing us to a Body of Men to make our Complaint to, should thereby give one or two of them a Dominion over us.

6. The 1. of *Peter* 5. 3. is made use of for the same end: From whence they conclude, that there was no need of the Apostle's Command, if they had not had a Power. But 'tis a strange way of arguing to infer, that because an ill thing is forbidden that therefore it must give them a right to do

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do it. Besides this Command might be Prophetical to prevent what would happen; and we see too much Reason to believe it so. Besides it also shews how soon Pride, Ambition and Avarice, began in the Church.

A 7th Argument for their Power is drawn from *John* 20. 21. which they found their Power of Bishops upon. Several Volumes have been writ upon this Subject: The words are, *As my Father hath sent me, so I send you.* To which I shall give but a brief Answer.

1. Christ at the 19. *ver.* is said to address these words to the Disciples. From whence some conclude is meant only the Twelve Apostles, and from thence plead for the Bishops. Others say, the Seventy were included in the word Disciples, and so will have all the Ministers concerned. But if you look to *Acts* 1. 14, 15. you'll find the Women as well as Men are call'd Disciples; and so the Power will come to the whole Church.

2. You'll find that what is there said can only refer to Preaching, which was what the Father sent him to do, and not to judge or rule; for both them Things he denied to accept of when offered: For as his Kingdom is not of this World, so his Government, in a spiritual sense, is not neither. Besides, Christ was sent to redeem Sinners, and to do many Things that was not fit for the Apostles to do; therefore it could only refer to Preaching.

Now as the Clergy arrogate this Power to themselves, so they pretend a Power to constitute others in the same Office. This they would derive from the Apostles Imposition of Hands: For the maintenance of which there is required two things to support it. 1. To prove it a positive unalterable Institution. 2. Some particular Marks to distinguish the

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the Parties by, that are the imposers of it. In this Custom is to be consider'd.

1. That laying on of Hands was not to institute an Office, but to convey the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost. It was used by *Moses* to *Joshua* when appointed a General; and serves to no Ecclesiastical Purpose, except it be done by those that can infuse the Holy Ghost by the Imposition.

2. 'Tis order'd *Numb. 9. 9.* that *Moses* should bring the *Levites* before the Tabernacle of the Congregation, and gather the whole Church of the Children of *Israel* together, and that he should bring the *Levites* before the Lord, and the Children of *Israel* (that is some of them) should lay Hands on the *Levites*: So it was not *Levites* laid Hands on *Levites* to bring them into Office, but the People. So in the New Testament the Apostles Hands were laid on several to heal them, and to infuse the Holy Ghost, *Matth. 9. 18.* *Mark 5. 29.* *Acts 9. 24.* So *Ananias* laid his Hands on *Paul*, not to ordain him a Minister; nor did *Barnabas* alledge the Imposition of the Hands of *Ananias* to admit him amongst the Apostles, *Acts 9. 27.* but that he had seen a Vision, and that he preached the Gospel. Why do not our Ministers now lay their Hands on the Sick? I believe they will find as much Power to heal as to institute, and be as able to convey the Holy Ghost, as to prove the continuance of it: Nay, why should not Extream Unction be used as well? *Matth. 10. 16.* Christ laid his Hands on Children, but did not make them Bishops, or Elders; nor did he lay Hands on the Disciples when he appointed them. *Paul, Tim. 4. 13.* orders him to give attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, &c. and not to neglect the Gift (not Office) which was
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given him by the laying on of Hands, &c. Laying on of Hands to cure the Sick, and to convey a Miraculous Power of the Holy Ghost, was in the Primitive Times a confirmation of Christianity. *Acts* 14. 23. & 1. 22. there is not one word mentioned of the laying on of Hands. I can neither see any Law nor Institution for the continuation of it; nor yet who should be the continuers of it. They that practice a Thing because another hath done it, and cannot make it useful to the same End, (nor indeed to any End) except it be doing of Mischief, and getting a Power over Men to destroy the Foundation of Christian Love and Charity, had better let it alone. Surely God doth nothing in vain; nor ought Imposing of Hands to be, when 'tis an empty Ceremony. If the Gift cease, surely the Ceremony should too. And yet this insignificant Ceremony is made as significant a Thing as the Fundamentals of Religion it self, even to the destruction of what the Apostle esteems more than Miracles, or a Faith that can remove Mountains.

Others there are that are willing to lay this aside, yet they must be approved by the Neighbour-Ministers, as they call it, set apart for the Ministry; and without this a Minister must not be fit to teach, or be fit to be heard by the People; in which they take upon them to judge every one, and to allow only of those of their own Profession: And this is as much valued, and as much stress laid on it, as on the greatest Points of Religion, which is the occasion of the uncharitableness of the Thing. Else, I think, if 'tis allowed of as a Secular Thing, (which I cannot see to be any other) and be appointed by Act of Parliament that it may be of good Use (for too much Care cannot be taken to

keep

keep out scandalous Ministers, no more than scandalous Members) but then let it not be confined to Ministers Approbation only, who will only approve of them like themselves, but to select Lay-Blders, that may consider the usefulness of the Person more than the particular Interest of the Clergy: For 'tis easie to see what sort of Men the Ministers, among all sorts of Parties, have allowed of, especially if they have been educated for the Ministry.

Others pretend a Succession from the Apostles; but deny that one Bishop or Presbiter may bear Rule over another. This makes a mighty Contest between the *Church of England* and the *Presbyterians*.

Thus the Hierarchy, that is meerly of Humane Invention, and was brought into the Church for Unity sake, is made the cause of the most bloody Wars, and greatest Schisms that ever were in the World, and an occasion of intolerable Pride, Ambition, Emulation and Contention, while not one hundred part of the People understand the Controversie they are so hotly contending for; but only have a Zeal for their Party that they are engaged with: For every Party, as they are more potent or numerous than the other, take it to be their Priviledge, or rather Right, to call all the rest that are not of their mind Factionous or Schismatical, and under that name and pretence to persecute or ruine them. But I can see no Reason why one Party should be called more a Sect than another, only because 'tis less in number, or less favoured, in the World than the other.

Now had this acquired Power of the Clergy, though a Usurpation, been made use of for the Good of the universal Church of Christ, and the true Interest of Religion, and for a thorough Reformation;

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mation, and the improvement of the Gospel, it might have pleaded a great deal for its Usefulness and Necessity : But since 'tis not only an Imposition, but the main Engine made use of to ingage Parties to breed Confusions and Persecutions, I cannot but think it high time to lay it aside.

Now as I have shewed to you what 'tis that the Clergy build their great *Babel* upon, and the insignificancy of their Foundation, so I shall in the next place prove two Things.

1. That almost every Thing, relating either to Discipline or Order, is alter'd; and if one Thing may be alter'd, all may. And,

2. I shall prove that the Government of the Church doth not belong to the Ministers.

1. Every Thing relating to Church Order and Discipline is altered. For first, in the Primitive Times the first Churches were only Apostolical and Congregational, and were made up, as *Jer. 3.* of one of a City, and two of a Family; so as 'twas impossible for them to cohabit together, and so could only compose particular Churches; these are changed into National and Parochial: The Primitive Churches have undergone several Mutations. The Diocesan and National Church Forms were the first that invaded the Primitive Institution: and though many have cast off the Pope, that hath overrun and over-strained his Power, making Religion a meer piece of Policy, and to contain almost nothing else in it, which hath justly occasioned the Reformers to separate from it, yet upon an impartial View, I doubt the same Principles will be found to be aimed at and to be increasing in the Church, even among those that are separated from other Churches upon that very account. Prejudice and Interest

Interest are very apt to Byas our Understanding; but 'tis strange to see how those that pretend to be guided by Scripture Rules, should be so imposed upon by usurping Spirits.

2. Church Government it self is altered: For 1. Cor. 1. 2. *Ec.* Paul appointed Church Members to determine Controversies; these Things are now appointed to be heard by the Civil Magistrate. But some will say that these are Civil Things, and that it was three hundred Years after Christ's time till *Constantine's* time, before any Distinction was made between Civil and Ecclesiastical Things; and so Things could not be heard otherways, because there was only Heathen Magistrates. This I grant; but still it was of Apostolick Institution, as well as Excommunication about Fornication, Incest, &c.

3. If the Alms of the Church was in the Apostles Hands, *Acts* 5. 1. it was altered by the Apostles, and put into the seven Deacons Hands. This was a part of Church Government and Discipline too; and as there was seven Deacons or Overseers of the Poor then, you have now but two or three in a Church. The Holy Kiss mentioned *Rom.* 18. 16. is not now used, the times for Collections for the Poor, and a great many other Things.

4. The Bishops had not then so large an Extent as now the Church makes them, nor that Power over other Bishops or Presbiters; there being, as is plain to be seen in most ancient Authors, Bishops or Presbiters in every small Town; and so the Apostle writes *Philip.* 1. 1. *To all the Saints that are in Christ Jesus at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons.* This increase of the Bishops Jurisdiction laid the Foundation of the Papal Power, and caused those great Mischiefs and Evils that have befallen

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the greatest part of the World ; and the same Evils have been the constant Consequences of Church Power in all Ages.

5. The whole Constitution of Bishops, according to the *Church of England*, hath been altered : For there were two Arch-Bishops, one of *Canterbury* and another of *York* ; the Bishops took the Oaths of Obedience to the Arch-Bishops, they did arrogate the Power of Ordination to themselves : Though some of the Bishops owned they had the Power jointly with the Presbiters, some denied it, So likewise concerning their Titles, Dignities, their places in the House of Lords, &c. the Presbiters had their Clerks in Convocation, which the Bishops denied them the nomination of : So concerning Deans and Chapters. And as they have altered these Things, so they have their first Constitution ; for they have constantly been increasing their Power, and making new additions to it, which they have always been interceeding both King and Parliament for ; which makes it a Humane Thing, and that some of them do own. They that ascribe a Power to any one to compleat them in their Administration, do acknowledge the Original Power to be in that Power that they would derive their Power from. This the *Church* hath done, and the *Presbyterians* desired to do the same in the late Times, and yet we see to what a Hierarchy the *Church* is got to, that doth not pretend to a Divine Right ; and therefore to what a Usurpation would *Presbitery* have arrived to, could they have established it by a Law, and have been able by such a Power and Interest to improve it, as the *Church* hath had an Opportunity of improving of theirs ? The late Times give proof enough of what they aimed

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ained at about the Year 1646; and the first Constitution of the Church of Scotland shews what a persecuting uncharitable Temper Presbitery would run Men into. And though it may be answered, that the Church of Scotland is more moderate now: I fear 'tis more owing to the Awe the Church of England hath over them, than either their Principles or Temper.

6. 'Tis not now with the Church or Dissenters as in the Primitive Times, as to the Ministers themselves: For now the Ministers have assumed the only Power to exercise and dispense the Word, whereas in the Primitive Times the People did it too. 1 Pet. 4. 10. *As every Man* (that is, as any Man) *hath received the Gift, even so minister the same to one another.* To justify this practice, see Mark. 3. 16. Heb. 10. 25. & 5. 12. *For the time ye ought to have been Teachers of others:* Speaking not of the Ministers or Pastors, but of the Church of the Hebrews. See 1 Theff. 5. 11. Rom. 15. 14. Jude 20. &c. By which it will appear that Teaching was not a particular Office, as now 'tis made: Nor is there any Reason to object that these Instances were extraordinary, and that they had extraordinary Gifts to qualify them for it; for there was nothing in it contrary to Divine Institution. 'Tis certain 'twas the practice of the Church, and hath as good Right to Succession as that of the Ministers, for ought I can see.

When the Church that was at Jerusalem was scattered by the Persecution, the Apostles stay'd at Jerusalem, Acts 8. but those of the Church that were scattered, preached the Gospel. Now we do not find that the Apostles sent them out to preach, nor that they did confirm them, but God confirm'd
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their Ministry by the Converts they made ; and even they that were so far from being confirmed by the Apostles, that they only preached Christ out of Envy. the Apostle Paul was so far from forbidding of them, that he rejoiced at their preaching ; *Phil. 1. 15.* Nay, even in the corrupted Times of the Church, when the Foundation of the Roman and other Hierarchy was laid, *Origen* going from *Alexandria* to *Palestine*, by the desire of the Elders of that Country, he publicly preached in the Church, although he was not in Holy Orders ; at which Action when *Demetrius* Bishop of *Alexandria* was offended, *Alexander* Bishop of *Jerusalem*, and *Theoctistus* Bishop of *Cesaria*, writ to him in defence thereof, as followeth ; *Whereas you write in your Letter, that it was never seen or done that Lay-men should Preach in the Presence of the Clergy, therein you wander from the Truth ; for wheresoever any are found that are fit to profit the Brethren, the holy Clergy of their own accord ask them to preach unto the People ;* and gives many Instances of several that did so. And *Tertullian* says, *that in the time of the Gospel all Christians were Priests to God ;* which he gives as a Reason for the using of Extream Unction to all after Baptism, in imitation of *Moses* and *Aaron*. But now if a Man act out of Zeal to Religion, and endeavour to promote Holiness, 'tis a kind of Sacrilege ; not but Learning is a great help. But what the Ministers pretend to now to be a Qualification, was not so in the Apostles times ; then 'twas only the Gifts of the Spirit, and not Learning. But if the Apostles had an Authority that was guided by an infallible Spirit, I cannot see why a Man, though set apart for a Minister, should have the same Authority ; when 'tis plain from

from his practice he is acted by the Spirit of the Devil: Which I cannot but fear Men are that hate and persecute their Brethren.

2. As the Apostles were influenced by the Spirit of God, which instructed them in his Mind and Will, and gave them Understanding in all Languages to reveal it to all Nations, we think to supply this with Humane Learning: But 'tis a different way and method to what they used; they did not preach from Texts of Scripture, as our Ministers do, but declared the Mind of the Spirit. Now if they differ in the main Fundamentals of their Office, and supply so great a Defect with Humane Invention, how much more reasonable is it, by Humane Policy, to prevent the Mischiefs that they occasion, by their Pride and Avarice, to Religion; and to take that out of their hands which they pretend not the Gifts of the Spirit, but Humane Learning, to intitle them to? Especially such whose Conversation and Actions declare their Hatred to their Brethren, and to the purity of Religion. I will never believe that the Spirit of Christ was ever designed to accompany such Men to the end of the World.

5. All the Maintainance that I can find that was allowed the Ministers in Scripture, was by Collection: This is changed into an Inheritance, in which our Clergy have made a very saving Bargain; for they have gotten near a Tenth part of the Nation to maintain about Six or Seven Thousand of them, (which is more by half than is needed) whereas the Tithe in the Jewish State was to maintain above Two Hundred Thousand Levites.

6. Lay-ruling-Elders distinct from the Presbiterary is not made use of by any Party. That there were such

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such is plain from 1 Tim. 5. 17. where 'tis said, *Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour; especially those that labour in Word and Doctrine.* Which shews plainly two Things. 1. That there were Ruling Elders which did not labour in Word and Doctrine, that were Rulers in the Church; which cannot be meant of the Ministers, because we must suppose that they did labour in both. 2. It shews that there were Elders that did labour in the Word, else the Apostles had not needed in an especial manner to have mentioned them as such, distinct from them that did not labour in the Word: But both these might be Lay-men too; for that such did labour in Word and Doctrine is plain from what I have said before.

Lay-Elders are made mention of as Governours among the Jews, Lev. 4. 15. Numb. 11. 25. Jos. 24. 31. Judg. 2. 7. &c. So Rom. 12. 8. all Church Members are exhorted to discharge their distinct Gifts and Offices; and particularly the Work and Business of the Ruler is mentioned distinct from that of the Preacher and Teacher. 1 Cor. 12. 28. the several degrees of Offices are mentioned; 1. Apostles, 2. Prophets, 3. Teachers, and then Gifts and Governours: So that if the Teachers will rank themselves among Governours, they will be but in the 4th and last degree, and so lose one degree of their Privilege. I think it best to follow the Apostle's Advice, 1 Cor. 6. 4. to let them be least esteemed in the Church that shall take Government upon them, or pretend that it belongs to them: For they may with as much Reason say, that no Lay-men had the Gifts of Miracles and Prophecy, as that they did not preach and exercise Government. Which that they had is plain from
Scripture,

Scripture, because there is mention of Women that had the Spirit of Propheſie. And *Tertullian* ſays, there were approved Elders preſided in the Church, which he mentions by the name of *Seniores*, not *Epifcopi* nor *Presbuteri*. That theſe were not Biſhops or Miniſters, but Lay-Elders approved by the People, is plain; becauſe 'tis ſaid it was in a Church where was but one Preſbyter or Miniſter. And *Dr. Amie* in his Book againſt *Bellarmino* ſays, that they had in the *Primitive Times* Ruling Elders, that only attended on matters of Government. And as for their Arguments, that the Elders and Miniſters are all one, I ſee no Reaſon, becauſe of the Elders feeding of the Flock; for the Church or Laity did pray with the Sick, exhort one another in Love, and edifie one another; and Teachers are every where mention'd diſtinct from Elders: However there is no where in Scripture any Precept for the continuance of ſuch an Officer, nor any mention made any where what their particular Office is to be, no more than of the Preſbyter or Biſhop; nor is it ſaid that any thing ſhall be unalterable in either of their hands.

Which leads me to the Second Thing propounded, which was to prove, That Government doth not belong to the Miniſters. For,

1. Chriſt himſelf reſuſed any thing of Government, both when they would have made him a King, and a Judge or Arbitrator, *Luke 12. 14.* he answers, *Who made me a Judge over you?* Indeed this was Temporal Affairs; but he doth not make any diſtinction between one and the other; and his Denial is general. Beſides, when the Apoſtles were contending who ſhould be greateſt, *Luke 12.* he puts a Queſtion to them at *ver. 27.* *Whether is greateſt, he that ſitteth at Meat or he that ſerveth?* Which

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Which he concludes himself to be he that sitteth at Meate; and that he himself was of the number of those that served, and not of those that expected Rule or Authority either in Church or State: For so he intimates at ver. 29. that both his and his Disciples Kingdom were to come; and that there only they were to expect Greatness and Government. Greatness in this World is a thing wholly opposite to Religion, which is built wholly upon Self-resignation, and a despisal of all Things here below.

A Church Office signifies a Service, and not State and Dignity, or Earthly Grandure; and though a Man may be of an humble Mind, and a Christian forbearing Temper, a hater of Covetousness, &c. yet none of these Vertues can give him Dominion, because the bent and design of Christianity is against Usurpation and Worldly Greatness, as is plain in Christ's own Life and Practice. An Officer is but an ordained appointed Person to do Service for them that appoint him; the Constituted cannot be greater than the Constitutor, especially when the end and design is Business and Service, and not State.

2. The Apostles themselves, at the afore-cited place *Luke 12.* being in Contention who should be greatest, Christ tells them that *Government belongs to Kings and Princes*; and at ver. 26. positively tells them that *it shall not be so with them; for he that is or would be greatest should be least, and least esteemed of.* So *Matth. 20. & 24.* Christ there minds them whom Authority belongs to; but among them, he tells them, there should be no such thing, neither in Authority nor Priority; for in Christ, and so in the Church, we are to be one and Brethren. And as for the Authority Christ speaks of, it could only refer.

refer to Ecclesiastical, because the Apostles were Fishermen, and could expect no Worldly Authority, because Christ every where cautions them against such Expectations. Besides, the Occasion of Christ's Words were upon their exercising of Censures, and Authority, and endeavouring after a Priority over one another, and their own Preferment, and not about Worldly State or Greatness. And if the Apostles were not to assume Government, I cannot understand how inferiour Ministers should. True Christianity ought to make Men strive who should be least and humblest, and not who should be greatest; and therefore Christ *Matth. 23. 11.* tells them, that *they that would be greatest among them should be their Servants.* Government is a foreign thing to the Church

3. *Matth. 18. 17.* 'tis not said tell it the Minister or Pastor, nor yet the Apostles or Presbiters, but the Church; that is, the Body of the Church. But of this in another place.

4. At *1 Cor. 4. 4.* the *Corinthians* were making of Parties, and exalting of *Paul* and *Apollo*, &c. but *Paul* tells them that *neither he nor Apollos, nor Cephas, were any thing*, (though an Apostle) that they were the Churches; that is, their Servants, Brethren, &c. For they, that is the Church, was Christ; and that the exalting of their Ministers, and setting up Parties making Division, was as the Apostle says, *a carnal thing.*

5. All Offices hindering a Minister in Preaching, Praying, Studying, &c. ought to be laid upon others. This the Apostles did, *Acts 6. 24.* &c. they refused meddling with Church Government, because they would, as the 4th Verse informs you, give themselves constantly to Prayer, and the Ministry

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nistry of the Word : And if Christ and his Apostles disclaim Government and Authority, I know not whom the Clergy will derive theirs from. And therefore the preferring Things that at best are dubious, and the straining Texts of Scripture as they do, in opposition to the plain revealed Commands of Love and Charity, can be only out of a design to serve their private Interest and Ambition. A plain Evidence of which we have in the hot Contentions that there is for Ceremonies and Authority, while hardly any Zeal appears for the Reformation of Mens Lives, and the Propagation of the Gospel ; and much less Zeal is there seen for a universal Charity among Protestants. But Ecclesiastical Authority, with all its Intrigues and Designs, can never keep up or uphold the Gospel ; for 'tis a thing contrary to all Worldly Devices, instead of advancing of it they ruine it : For where Men have their Eyes open they will see through such Designs, and then they come to be prejudic'd against Religion it self. 'Tis only the Simplicity of the Gospel can maintain it ; and therefore what Policies are used must proceed from the Temporal, and not the Spiritual Authority. And in that Sense I must own my self of ones Mind, that says, *That Policy and Religion do well together ; because the one is too cunning to be good, and the other too simple to be safe.* But then each must be by themselves, and not made a part of other ; because the Simplicity of the Gospel Streams are too pure to admit of mixture. But Men are unwilling to live up to the strictness of Life in all Things, that is needful for the Propagation of the Gospel ; and therefore 'tis that they endeavour, by these Devices and Policies, to supply what their want of Simplicity, Charity and Purity, will not credit Religion with.

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Had the Scriptures said that of Ecclesiastical Officers that it doth of Civil, that they are Gods, and of his appointment, and made by him, what a height would it have raised the Clergy too? But in the Election of Civil Magistrates they c^on there is no more to be understood than God's Institution of the Office, the Qualification of the Person, and the Inclination of the People to make a fit Choice; and yet they will pretend a great deal more from *Acts* 20. 28. whom the Holy Ghost hath made Overseers.

Now as we find the slight Title the Clergy have to their Government, and experience that this Power proves scandalous to the Church, and a Bone of Contention that occasions Schisms, breaks Love, causes Heart-burning, and makes Religion seem nothing but a Trick and a Delusion. 'Tis high time to alter it, and put it into other hands, and by good Laws to deliver the People from its Tyranny.

Should Infidels live among us, and hear that we believe in one God, that we pretend to a Religion grounded on Peace, Love and Charity, that is free from Pride, and that engages Men to be haters of the World; would they ever believe us, or turn to our Religion if they consider our Practices?

But some will pretend that these Things are not necessary to be inquired into, they being what Salvation doth not depend upon, nor is it an essential part of Christianity. But 'tis what the Pope hath advanced himself and his Religion by, to that height it hath arrived to, and others aim at the same Thing. For the chief Occasion of this growing Authority hath been the Peoples neglect of their Church Government, and of their Rights and Priviledges,

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viledges, that hath given to the Clergy the Opportunity of the Usurpation they have gotten.

Now as I have told you the slight Pretences of the Clergy to their Authority, the Mischiefs they have done in the Church with it, and that 'tis a Usurpation, and not what doth belong to them; so it will be necessary to consider what Ecclesiastical Power is, and who it doth belong to.

1. Ecclesiastical Power, so much of it as can be grounded on Scripture, (and I think no other Power else belongs to the Church) as I told you before, consists only in a receiving into, and a casting out of the Church, and in choosing of Officers: What relates to other Things are left indifferent, provided they come under the general Direction of doing Things according to Decency and Order; which I shall have occasion to treat of hereafter.

2. 'Tis evident that the Church was made by Christ's Institution, the immediate and primary subject of what Power belongs to it, and that the Apostles were but Parts and Members of the same, though they were more eminent and useful than others; and the Apostles deriving any Power from Christ was, as they were Members of the Church, and the Persons that God chose to reveal his Mind to the Church by: For the Ministers and Church Officers must have their primary Power from the Church. 'Tis but vain cavilling to pretend succession from Christ; for all Officers ought to be chosen, tryed and approved, by the Church, there being no Eldership or Presbitery in Scripture, but what the Church Act did either preceed or accompany:

But here ariseth an Objection, Whether the Power belongs to the universal Church, or to particular

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Particular Churches? To this I Answer, That some Things belong to the Particular Churches, others to the Universal or General Church: For the Explanation of which it will be necessary to consider what Power belongs to each of them.

I shall begin with a Particular Church. The word Church signifies an Assembly not only of Religious Persons, but in some few places of other Persons too, as *Psal.* 26. 5. *Acts* 19. 32. but most commonly a Religious Assembly; however 'tis never taken for the Minister, but a Body or an Assembly of several Persons. Even the Clergy themselves are forced to acknowledge that the Power of the Keys doth belong to the Church, when they oppose the *Church of Rome's* Usurpations, though in other Disputes they will have the Power in the Bishop or Presbiters. One or two Persons cannot make a Church, nor can such a number as exceeds the conveniency of meeting together make a Particular Church. A very great number cannot meet to partake of Gospel Ordinances; they cannot hear the Minister preach, &c. Bishops or Presbiters can no more make up a Church, than a General and his Officers can make up an Army. Besides the Officers are often distinguished from the Church, as *Acts* 20. 17. and the People from the Officers, *1 Pet.* 5. 2.

Now it was mutual Agreement and Consent, in the Primative Times, that made up the Particular Churches of Christ; that is, a Covenant made one with another, and not with a Pastor or Pastors, to be their Ruler or Governour.

For I cannot but think that the Primative Churches were made up of Volunteers; that is, of those whom God made willing by calling them
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into relation to himself, and not by cohabitation: They were, as I said before, composed as *Jer. 3.* of one of a City, and two of a Family; so that it was impossible either for them to live together, or to associate, without Agreement. And so the Apostle tells you, *Acts 1. 14.* These (that is the Church) continued together with one accord or consent; so *Acts 2. 1. & 5. 12. & 2. 47.* For there was in those Times no Magistrate, or Persecution, to make them consent to be Church Members, whether they would or not.

This Covenant or Agreement some make a Divine Institution, and thereby cause the People to look upon it, if not in Opinion yet in Practice, as one of the most necessary Things that belongs to Religion, even to the contradiction of the most positive and necessary Law we have in the Gospel, which is that of Charity, to those that are not of the same way; whereas were it only esteemed of as a necessary and convenient Thing to keep up Order in the Church, and as what was practised by the Apostles who were guided by an infallible Spirit, and so were most likely to propose the best and most convenient Government, that would answer the End and Design of the Gospel, (which I cannot see to be any other Thing; there being, as I can find, no positive Law or Command for Church Government, it being grounded by all Parties only on the practice of the Primitive Times) it would as well answer the End and Design of Government, and not occasion that prejudice to Religion that it doth, by laying a foundation for Uncharitableness and Prejudice one against another.

For as my Lord Chief Justice *Hales* well observes, in his Book put out by Mr. *Baxter*, That
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Essence or Foundation of Religion doth not consist in this, or any other particular Form of Church Government. A good Government is a great help to its Purity and Unity; but a Man may be a good Christian, and of the Church of Christ, under this or any other Form of Government; nay, where there is no Form of Church Government at all; (as I shall have occasion to prove hereafter). And though we ought to go as near the Scripture Rules and Practice as we can, yet it doth not follow that Things that we receive only from the Practice of the Church, should be of that consequence that Things positively commanded are; and to be valued and preferred before the necessary and great Points of Salvation.

Now they that are of this Society ought to be Christians, and such as profess Faith in Christ. This Profession must be such as a Rational Christian may judge to be serious and sincere by the Profession they make, and the Life they live.

The End of Church Society is to administer and receive the Sacrament, to watch over and help one another Heaven-ward, to provoke one another to Love, and to the doing of good Works, 1 Cor. 12. 25. to exhort one another, pray for one another, and in the mutual Education one of another.

Having told you what a Particular Church is, and how constituted, I shall now proceed to let you know what Power belongs to it.

1. The Power of Excommunication, or casting out, and likewise of receiving into the Church, doth belong to Particular Churches, as is plain from 1 Cor. 5. Where the Church is blamed, not the Minister or Pastor, for neglecting their Duty about

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the Incestuous Person, and required together at ver. 4. to deliver him to Satan; *In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye (that is the Church) are gathered together, &c.* This was the act of the Church in Christ's Name: And so in several places of the *Revelations*, Christ addresses himself to the particular Churches about their several Sins for to remedy them. Of this Opinion is Dr. *Andrews* and others: And *Cyprian* says, that from the first time he was elected Bishop or Presbiter, he had resolved to do nothing without the consent of the People. And *Clements Romanus* calls the Censures of the Church, *the Things commanded by the Multitude*. And so *Dionysius* Bishop of *Alexandria*, in his Letter to *Fabius* Bishop of *Antioch*, says, that one *Serapion*, that had fallen in the Times of Persecution, who had several times appeared before the Church to beg their Pardon; but no one did ever take any notice of him, *Euseb.* p. 246. And *Cyprian* complains of the unwillingness of his People to readmit several that returned from the Schism of *Fortunatus*, and the great Difficulty he had to obtain their consent, in his Letter to *Cornelius* Bishop of *Rome*, p. 143. Several other places may be found to the same effect, in the Ecclesiastical Writers of the first Ages of the Church.

2. If our Brother trespass against us we are to tell it the Church, *Matth.* 18. 18. and whatsoever they bind and loose on Earth shall be confirmed in Heaven. If *Paul* or *Peter*, or an Apostle, much more if a Bishop, Presbiter or Elder, (for all are Brethren in Christ, and one, as I said before) and if a Brother offend, we are not to tell it to *Peter* or *Paul*, or to the Bishop, Presbiter or Elder, or any other, or other Churches, but to the Church:
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And this I think must be a particular *Church*, because there was none but particular *Churches* in the Primative Times, as I have proved before; and 'tis most likely that he should go to that *Church* that is nearest to him, or that he belongs to; for in many places the *Churches* were at a great distance one from another. It was not likely that upon particular Differences they should travel to *Jerusalem*, or have general Meetings upon so slight occasions, especially where a *Church* was single, and it may be might not meet with another *Church* to join with, to examine the Matter, without traveling some hundreds of Miles. Now without the Power of receiving in, and casting out, the *Church* can neither preserve it self pure, nor cast out impure Members, nor yet reform its Officers: For the *Church* ought not to receive in all comers and goers, as the *Church of England* doth. That is one of the main Things that hath brought in so much Impurity and Irreligion into it as is in it. The Apostle exhorts to receive only those that are of the Faith, *Rom. 14. 1.* and 'tis as necessary that they should cast out Vicious Members, or else the Bad will quickly grow more numerous than the Good, as the *Church of England* makes evident. This Power of Reforming, if well observed, as one says, the Wit of Men and Angels could not have imagined a better Way, or given better Direction to settle that which is Just and Good, and to prevent all Parties and Factions; and yet leaves a sufficient Latitude for several orderly ways to attain the chief End.

A Second Thing that I think belongs to a particular *Church*, is the Choice of Officers. The first Apostle chose, after Christ's Death, was *Matthias*,
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by One Hundred and Twenty of the Christian Assembly, *Acts* 1. 5. These were not all Apostles, as appears by *ver.* 14. That they chose two is plain at *ver.* 23. *Joseph* and *Matthias*, who 'tis said they appointed, though the Lot fell on *Matthias*, whom 'tis said at *ver.* 26. was numbered among the Apostles.

After him was no other Apostle chose, but *Paul* and *Barnabas*: The management of their Choice is *Acts* 13. 1. where 'tis said, that in the Church of Antioch there were certain Prophets and Teachers, &c. At *ver.* 2. 'tis said, that the Holy Ghost ordered them (that is the Church) to separate *Paul* and *Barnabas*. The Calling was declared by the Holy Ghost, and their Institution authorized by the Church of Antioch, *ver.* 3. And *Acts* 14. 14. they are both called Apostles. That they were declared Apostles by this act is plain *Rom.* 1. 1. where he uses the word *separate*. 'Tis therefore plain that *Paul* and *Barnabas* was not chose by the first Apostles, but by the Church of Antioch, as *Matthias* was by the Church at Jerusalem; and though *Matthias* was proposed by the Apostles, and *Paul* and *Barnabas* by the Holy Ghost, yet neither were chose without Consent of the Church.

And so *Acts* 6. 4. it is manifest that the Apostles declared the Seven Elect, yet the Congregation chose them, as appears *ver.* 5. where 'tis said, *it pleased the multitude, and they chose them*; and therefore it may with as much Reason be supposed that they appointed them too: However 'tis plain that all the acts of Choice preceded all Declarations or Separations; therefore 'tis positive against them that appoint Church Officers without any Choice. And though some dispute is made about the word *we* and

ye at ver. 3. yet tis much of the same import, Only ye would have shewed that the Apostles had no concern in it, and we may imply (though I think it doth not, because of what is said before) that the Apostles and People had a hand together in it, and that together they made up the Church.

If the Bishops or Presbiters, or one Party of Men, must be chooser of the Ministers, there can be no Doctrine preached but such as is agreeable to that Party and Interest that chose them; and so if a Man turn Heretick or Debauched, it can only be in the Power of those that made them to unmake them, and the People must still sit under their Ministry, which is a Thing that very much needs a Reformation: For this will be the consequence of Ministers and others, being Judges in their own Cases, that they will always favour one another too. Many Instances of which I could give were it convenient.

But some will object, and say, that *Titus*, Tit. 1. 5. is commanded to ordain Elders in every City. What these Elders were is disputable: But suppose them Ministers, he might do it not by appointing of them, but by gathering the People together to do it, as Sheriffs are said to choose Parliament Men, because they order and gather the People together to do it, &c. If *Titus* did it himself, he plainly contradicts the practice of the Apostles before him, and the practice of the Fathers after him: For *Cyprian* says, that *Sabinus* was elected Bishop of *Emenita* by the Suffrage of all the People, in his Epistle, p. 202. So *Eusebius*, says *Fabius*, was chosen Bishop of *Rome* by all the Brethren who were met together in one place for that very end. *Cyprian* says it was the Custom of all *Africa* so to do; and that at an
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African Synod held *Anno 258.* determined, That at the Ordination of Ministers the People should be present, that so the Crimes of the Wicked may be detected, and the Merit of the Good declared, *apud Cyprian.* p. 251, p. 79. So *Clement's Romanus* says, *The Apostles ordained Bishops and Deacons by the consent of the whole Church.* The same Things may be found in most of the Fathers of the first Ages of the Church. An Instance of the Benefit of which is to be seen in several Parishes in *England*, that are not in the Bishops Gift, but in the Election of the People to choose their Ministers. I know several of these Parishes, in all which there is good Preachers, and in most sober Men; where they are not so they have turned to Debauchery since their Election: But the Dissenters, and the Clergy of the Reformed Churches abroad, are Evidence enough of the Benefit of the Peoples Election.

And therefore as the People had a Power of choosing and receiving Officers and others into the Church, so they had and ought to have now a Power of casting them out too. So *Clem. Romanus* says, p. 64. *That the offending Deacons were to be tried by the whole Multitude, and the whole Church.* And so it was in the Case of *Martialis* and *Basilides*, Spanish Bishops, who were turned out for Apostacy and Idolatry, and in their room was elected, by the People, *Felix* and *Sabinus*: The two former claim'd the exercise of their Office; upon which the People appealed to several of the Clergy in *Africa*, who being convened *Anno 258*, *Cyprian* being their President, they approved the Proceedings of the People, and concluded that it was according to Divine Law, which was express, That none but those that were Holy and Blameless should approach God's Altar;

Altar ; and that if they had continued to communicate with their prophane Bishops, they would have been accessary to their Guilt and Villany, and would have contradicted those Examples and Commands in Scripture, which oblige a People to separate from their wicked and ungodly Ministers : That they had acted regularly in what they had done, since as the People had the chief Power in choosing worthy Ministers or Bishops, so also of refusing those that were unworthy, *Epist. 68. apud Cypr. p. 200, 201.* Many other Passages of the same kind are to be found in that Synodical Epistle, and also in *Irenius* and others.

By which it appears very plain to me, that the Choice of Officers, the Power of Receiving into the Church, and the Power of Excommunication, belongs to Particular Churches, and not to the Officers. But as I think Church Censures belongs to the Church, so I think the Weapons of the Church ought only to be Spiritual ; and that it was never appointed for a pretence to rake away Mens Lands, Houses, Goods, Liberties, Life, &c but to separate from him, and have no communion with him in matters of Religion or Spiritual Society. They are together in Christ's Name to pronounce Sentence, and not in their own, *1 Cor. 5. 4.* and though a Man is Excommunicated, yet upon sincere Repentance he is to be admitted again, and restor'd by a Spirit of Meekness, not Rigour : But if his Estate is wasted, his Family ruined, he will have little stomach to return to such a Church. Besides, if his Life is taken away, there is as much done as can be to ruine both Body and Soul. Our Clergy in this are more uncharitable than the Papists in killing People, when they have got them to be of a good Faith,

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as they think, whereas our Clergy act the *Italian* Revenge.

Now as I have shewed what a *Particular Church* is, and what *Power* belongs to it, so it will be necessary to shew what a *National* and a *Universal Church* is.

1. A *National Church*, as I said before, is made up of several *Particular Churches*, or *Assemblies* of that Nation, supposing all the *Congregations* in it to be *Christians*: These ought to consent and agree together for mutual Love, for the Safety of the Nation and Religion, in conjunction with the Civil Magistrate. These, I say, ought to consent, because 'tis both their Duty and their Interest, and so there needs no Compulsion, nor yet a Uniformity, though there ought to be Union.

For 1. as I said before, the Power of casting out and receiving in, and choosing of Officers, belongs to the *Particular Churches*. By this Power whatever was needful to keep the Church pure, to refine it and its Officers, is provided for; and in the *Primitive Times*, while the Church was both poor and persecuted, this Power was then sufficient, and was as much as was necessary to keep up and maintain the Church in her Order and Purity; (and therefore as this was the Foundation laid by Christ, so let no other Foundation be laid, least you are found to build Hay and Strubble). But this being premised, and this Foundation laid, as Peace, Pride and Interest, hath brought into the Church it self among its own Members, and as the politick Designs and Intrigues of the Churches Enemies are so increased and innumeraled, as that it was impossible to make particular provision, and give particular Rules against such a variety of Designs as the

the Churches Enemies have in every Age formed against her ; so I think there are some particular Things that God hath left a liberty to the Church to vary in, according to Time, Place, Accidents, and the Persons that compose the Church, and the State that the Church belongs to, concerning which there is no particular Form prescribed in Scripture, and therefore can only refer to that general Precept concerning Decency and Order ; provided that they do no way alter or differ from the Foundation and Rules above laid down ; and provided they tend to promote Charity and the Good of Religion, the general Good of Mankind and the Universal Church of Christ, and not to make Factions, or to uphold particular Parties.

For though the first Apostolical Churches were only Congregational, and though the primary Power doth belong to them, still it doth not follow but that these Congregations may, by their Representatives, do several Things that tend to the universal Good and Union of other Churches ; for certainly the Good of a Church ought to be preferred before the Good of a particular Member, and that of a Nation before that of a particular Church : And I believe for each Party to shew Love and Friendship to one another, will be of much more Advantage both to Church and State, and secure us against our common Enemies, much better than ever Persecutions will do.

Communion in Worship is one Thing, and in Government and Love another. Now a Union in Government can only be by Representatives. All the Congregations in England cannot meet together : And therefore though the Original Power is in the particular Congregations they cannot execute it,

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neither are they capable of the administration of it; and therefore 'tis fittest, not upon the account of Religion but Reason, that it should be managed by the *Churches* Representatives, who are to own their Power derived from the *Church*, which makes me give them that name. This, I think, can no way lessen the *Churches* Power; for as their Power is founded upon the *Church*, so it must be derived from them that give them Power. Nor will it hinder the *Churches* Power, in being able to reform their Officers when they will; because, I think, they ought to be chose Annually, or at least Tri-annually, and by Balloting Boxes. But I suppose some will object and say, That if them that are best able to undertake this Office should have it, then it must be the Ministers. But I think I have, from Experience and Scripture too, given Reason sufficient why it should not be in their Hands. Besides the Conditions upon which I place the Representatives Office, is wholly inconsistent with what they propose and offer; because I place it in Lay-ruling Elders, who as they are the Peoples Representatives, so they ought to be of them too.

2. As I said before, this ought to be done by Consent. Particular Churches are grounded upon Consent and Agreement, and so ought National: And as Christianity ought to mend all Men, and make them better than other in a publick Capacity, as well as a private; so 'tis our Duty to contribute what we can to the Good of the State we belong to, and to the Safety of the Churches that belong to that State; that so we affording them our assistance, may have mutual assistance and comfort from them. This I think is plainly our Interest as well as our Duty.

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But I suppose some will object, that to bring the Churches of a Nation to this Point, it will be of absolute necessity to force them to be of one Church.

I answer, no : For, as I said before, there may be Union where there is not and cannot be Uniformity ; and were it not for the Intrigues managed by the Clergy, to keep up their particular Interest and Parties, (several particulars of which I have given an account of,) I do not doubt but there would quickly be such an Agreement, as might establish and secure both the Church and State too. A plain Evidence of which is in *Holland* ; where though they have the same Parties, and many more, yet they live in Love, and agree together for the Common Good : The only Thing that produces such an Effect there, being the Care that they take to keep under the Clergy ; for there may and ought to be Union in Government and Charity, as I told you before, where 'tis not in Worship. 'Tis our Duty to take care of the Good of all Men, more particularly of the Nation and the Universal Church of Christ : Which leads me to the Third Thing proposed, which is to consider what the Universal Church is.

This consists of all true Believers living on the Earth, of which Christ is the Head, and none else, *Eph. 1. 10. & 5. 23.* There never was, nor could be, any other Catholick Church in the Primitive Times, because there was no National Churches, or other Constitution, to cause any. When we are baptized, we are baptized into the Name of Christ, and not into the Church ; and we belong to the Universal Church of Christ before we belong to any Particular Church : We are not baptized into the Church of *Rome, Corinth, &c.* or into the
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the Names of any of the Governours or Officers of these Churches. As soon as a Man is converted he becomes an Heir of Glory.

Now as these are Matters that relate to the Good of the Universal Church, and that relate to the particular Good of the several Churches in a Nation, and to the Nation it self, so I think it not convenient to ascribe too narrow Bounds to the Church, especially in Matters of Charity and Good Will towards Men; nor yet to make the Government so strait as not to reach a general Reformation of Manners, and the Comfort and Well-being of all those that live orderly and justly, let their particular Perswasions about indifferent Things, or Things not plainly revealed, be what it will. For the doing of which, I think that general Assemblies, composed of each particular Party, will be the most effectual way, and that by elected chosen Members, not of Officers, but such as shall be appointed by the People for their Honesty, Integrity, and a mild charitable Temper: For as 'tis a Point of Wisdom in any Government to reserve the chief Power in the whole Community, so 'tis to single out the wisest and best to exercise it; but then it ought to be with such a Limitation, that if the Trustees abuse that Power, they may remove and reform them: Or else you'll find the same Thing from other Church Governours, as the *Church of Rome* hath found in the Pope, who being intrusted with too much Power at first, did at length usurp it as his own, without acknowledging of the Church that they derived it from. Therefore if you make any Party the Subject of this Power, you lose the Power of reducing of them, whatever their Errors are.

But

But I suppose some will object, that they are not for the raising of one *Church* above another, much less a Party of Officers : But I suppose they will allow that one Christian ought to help and assist, and pray for one another ; and so I think may one *Church* do to another, though they should in some particulars be of different Opinions : Nor could an Assembly of *Church Elders* act as Governours more over one *Church* than another, because they are Representatives of all the *Churches*.

How many Quarrels and Disputes have we in this Nation about Religion, of Things that in themselves are insignificant ; being only managed by Parties to keep up their divided Interest, even to the hazard both of Religion, the Nation, and the hinderance of all true Piety and Reformation, to that degree, as to lay us open both to the worst of Enemies and Religions, as almost all the World (but a certain Party among us) esteem the *French* and *Roman Catholick* Interest to be ?

And is it not time to take some speedy course with such Breaches, and to heal such Divisions ? Doth not Religion, the Security of the Queen, the Government, and of our Lives and Families, call for a Remedy that may remove the cause of our Differences, and unite us in one Head, though not in one Church ? Doth not common Prudence require it ? Can any one believe that Religion was ever designed to make Men act as Creatures void of Understanding and Reason, and of all Justice and Equity ? Or that Religion, that is grounded on Love and Charity, should cause the greatest Envy, Hatred and Strife, that is in the World, and impower Men by it to destroy their Brethren, ruine Religion, and themselves and their Posterity ?
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And therefore as I have told you wherein our Mi-
 sery lyes, and who are the Occasion of it, so I
 might conclude with proposing some particular Re-
 medies to our present Evils : But there must be
 more Love and Charity found before the several
 Parties will bear it ; and therefore I shall leave it
 for a fitter Opportunity, and shall at present only
 Answer an Objection or two, which I suppose some
 will make ; and that is, That if Church Govern-
 ment be such an indifferent Thing, and not ground-
 ed upon any positive Command, what matter what
Church any one is of ?

Ans. 'Tis our Duty to stand up for the Truth :
 We are to oppose all Unrighteousness whatsoever,
 and to bear a Testimony against it.

Now there are many Things that are not so
 much Evil in themselves, as because of the Conse-
 quences they carry along with them, and the ill
 Use that is made of them ; for which Reason, I
 think that an ill *Church* Government is a just Rea-
 son for Separation, because 'tis the Foundation of
 most of the Mischiefs and Irreligion that befalls a
Church ; it lays the Foundation of Pride, Cove-
 tousness, Ambition, Persecution, Uncharitableness,
 and commonly ends in Loosness, Prophaneness and
 Idolatry it self. A Proof of which we have suffi-
 cient in the *Church of Rome*, and our *Church* was
 going formerly the same way, when they read the
 Book of Sports, set up Images in the Churches, &c.
 What these Things would have grown to, or would
 now, is to be questioned, had not the late Wars,
 and the present Separations from the *Church*, put
 some Check to it.

But I suppose some will object, and say, That
 they should stay till the *Church of England* is be-
 come

come Idolatrous, and like the *Church of Rome*, before they do separate.

But to that I Answer, They are too much alike in many Things, and were (as I hinted before) formerly in more; but had any had the Courage, and the Wisdom, to foresee the mischievous Consequences of the *Church of Rome*, and at its first setting up have separated from it, it would have put a check to her Usurpations better than any other way, and we had then had the Arguments of both sides transmitted to us, which would have given us a great insight into the Primative Times, which we have not now; it may be such as might have put a stop to other Usurpations: Besides, if we consider of what a cancerous nature Sin is, we shall find the only way is to nip it in the bud. But though there is several Occasions for Separations, and that 'tis best for all Men, and all bodies of Men, to keep and preserve themselves pure, yet I am not thereby for warranting Uncharitableness, nor for keeping up of Hatred and Malice, nor yet for ruining of a Nation to uphold Parties, (the Occasions of which I have already told you) and were those Occasions removed, I do not doubt but there might be Separations of Churches and Parties without Uncharitableness, and then I know no great Mischiefs that can attend it; nay, I am apt to believe that upon many accounts 'tis much better, where People differ in Opinions, that they should be parted then not; and I cannot but think that 'tis more easie to reconcile us in point of Charity than in points of Opinions, because the one is plainly and positively commanded, and the other but uncertain and disputable; and I believe left so only with a design for us to try and exercise our Charity

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by and upon. If this course will not reconcile us, I fear there is no other will ; and I am sure that if it did not bring us to one Mind, it would to one Interest, and unite us against our common Enemies, which I think 'tis our Duty to do both as Rational Creatures and Christians ; which if what I have here writ may produce, I shall think my Time well spent ; only before I conclude I must desire the Reader not to interpret any thing I have said to be done with Design or Prejudice, nor yet that I accuse all the Clergy of what I mention some to be guilty of. I know there is many of all Parties that are honest good Men, and would live in Love and Union with their Brethren ; I would only desire them of all Parties that are guilty, to reflect upon themselves, and that they would consider both the Evil and Danger of it, and that Division commonly proceeds from want of Love, not want of Light ; for Pride, Envy and Malice, have not been at a loss for the Truth, but are always contriving to set up something that they love better, as one well observes. And therefore be careful to receive the Truth in the Love of it, and I believe you will find my Proposals the best Remedy ; if not, if any other can be propounded that is better, I shall readily agree to it. And if I can provoke some better Pen to undertake so good a Work, I shall have my desire, let it but be effected.

That we lye under such Evils is plain to all Men, and that there is no body striving to remedy so great Evils is to me very strange, even when the common Safety, our Lives, Religion, Liberty, Posterity, and all that is to be esteemed by a good Man, calls for it. Shall not Heathens that have lost their Lives, Estates, &c. for their Countries Good,

Good, and the Good of Mankind, rise up in Judgment against this Generation, and condemn it? Doth the Precepts of Christianity less tend to the advancement of Honour and Vertue than the Heathens Morality did, that it hath so small an effect now a-days? Or rather, is not Christianity it self lost, or at least run only into Forms and Names, so as quite to lose its chief efficacy? O that Men would therefore consider it, and reflect upon themselves; and that every one would put a helping hand to promote our Love and Union, and do those Things that Religion, Vertue and Honour, call for, and let neither Self-love nor Hatred stand in the way, that we may be a happy People, and partake of the Blessings that God hath bestowed upon us in Peace and Love.

F I N I S.

2. I N I F